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TAGS: [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PTER](#) [IR](#) [IZ](#)  
SUBJECT: ICRC ON MEK, PLANS TO EXPAND ACTIVITIES IN IRAQ,  
AND IRAQ-IRAN AGREEMENT ON POW/MIA RETURNS

REF: A. BAGHDAD 2946  
[1](#)B. BAGHDAD 2658

Classified By: Ambassador Ryan C. Crocker for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: In an October 8 meeting with the Ambassador, ICRC Iraq head of delegation Juan Pedro Schaerer said that ICRC will increase its detention monitoring, hospital training, staffing, and other projects in Iraq in [1](#)2009. ICRC has stepped up its inspections of GOI detention facilities and recently visited two facilities in Basrah. Schaerer said ICRC will visit Camp Ashraf in late October to monitor the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) transfer, and noted that Iran has not replied to recent ICRC requests to repatriate a handful of former MEK who obtained refugee status from UNHCR. Schaerer expected that Iraq and Iran would sign a bilateral agreement in Geneva the week of October 13 establishing mechanisms to account for and return remains of POWs and MIAs from the Iran-Iraq war. Regarding the confusion with the Iraqi Red Crescent Society (IRCS) leadership, Schaerer said that ICRC would likely issue a statement of support for the PM's appointed transitional committee. ICRC President Jacob Kellenberger is planning to visit Baghdad January 18-20, his first visit since 2004. End Summary.

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Increasing ICRC Presence in 2009  
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[1](#)2. (SBU) ICRC Iraq Head of Delegation Juan Pedro Schaerer told the Ambassador during an October 8 meeting that although the ICRC will slightly decrease its overall Iraq budget for 2009 due to the phase-out of IDP food distribution, ICRC will significantly increase staffing, in-country training, and projects. He said there will be a markedly larger ICRC staff presence in Iraq in 2009, and it will have more resources to expand its scope of work. He expected to have five to six international staff in Baghdad at any one time. Plans are proceeding to assign a ten person team to Najaf to train hospital personnel.

[1](#)3. (C) Schaerer said that ICRC President Jacob Kellenberger is planning to visit Iraq January 18-20. He will meet with leaders in Baghdad, Erbil, and Najaf. In Najaf, he will likely meet with Grand Ayatollah Sistani, visit an Iraqi IDP camp, and visit ICRC projects. He will also visit a GOI detention facility. Schaerer said he hopes this visit will illustrate how the large security gains in the last few years should lead to an enhanced and less restrictive ICRC presence in Iraq. Kellenberger previously visited Iraq in 2004.

[1](#)4. (C) Schaerer said the ICRC has expanded its GOI detention facility inspections, including visiting two facilities in Basrah, al-Maqel prison and an Iraqi Army 14th Division facility. He said Minister of Justice Safa al-Safi has been very open and cooperative with ICRC and has taken ICRC recommendations on Ministry of Justice detention facilities constructively. Schaerer anticipates some

problems with working with Ministries of Defense (MoD) and Interior (MoI) officials on detention facilities, but he said the ICRC has experience working with security forces facilities, including 17 years experience inspecting the KRG Asayish facilities.

15. (S) Schaerer said that ICRC was coordinating with Task Force 134 on a two-week inspection visit of Camp Bucca in November. He added that ICRC would continue to visit divisional boarding sites for new coalition detainees and had agreed with the Pentagon that ICRC can inform family members of the whereabouts of such detainees. The Ambassador responded that the more ICRC visits, the better, especially in the transition to Iraqi authority. Noting ICRC's presence over the past five years, Schaerer commented on the huge improvement in detention conditions since 2005.

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MEK  
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16. (S) Schaerer said an ICRC team will visit Camp Ashraf again in late October to monitor the impending transfer of security responsibility for the Mujahedin e-Khalq (MEK) members there from the USG to the GOI (ref A). The team will also deliver messages from family members. Although MEK leaders are opposed to family contact, Schaerer said "they don't have a choice" in allowing family contact. Schaerer thinks family contact could help break the control of the leaders over MEK members and convince some to leave the organization. However, he noted that during his last visit, the members all repeated the "same mantra" in private

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conversations with the ICRC. He encouraged continued Embassy visits to Ashraf, which he said were helpful as they brought outside information to members, who are denied access to the media by the leaders. He believes the MEK leadership finally understands that the transfer will take place. He expressed concern about what instructions would come from the MEK leadership in France after the security transfer occurred.

17. (S) Since the GOI September 1 statement on assuring humane treatment of the MEK, the situation has been less tense in Ashraf, according to Schaerer. He was concerned that the GOI still had no comprehensive plan for post-transfer contingencies and how to control Ashraf. The Ambassador added that the MoI eviction order had been a "mistake" according to GOI officials, and noted that the Embassy had worked the GOI to walk this back. The GOI now needed to convene its MEK committee to establish plans. Schaerer remarked that the GOI had thought the MEK issue would be solved quickly but is now realizing it has much work to do. Schaerer reported that his subsequent meeting with the Minister of Interior had been positive and that the Minister was committed to the humane treatment assurances and focused on organizing the inter-ministerial committee.

18. (S) Regarding repatriating former MEK and current refugees to Iran, Schaerer noted that the Iranians had not replied to recent ICRC requests to repatriate about eight former MEK with refugee status, including one who was being treated for mental illness. Schaerer said it would be a problem if the Iranians went back on their commitment to repatriate former MEK. The Ambassador added that this could become a very serious problem since Iran is the only country that will take back the MEK once they leave the organization. Schaerer said he would discuss this problem with Iranian officials in Geneva the week of October 13.

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Iraqi-Iranian POW Agreement  
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19. (C) Schaerer informed the Ambassador that Iraqi and Iranian officials, represented by Minister of Human Rights

Wijdan Salim and a deputy Minister, respectively, will sign a bilateral agreement in Geneva next week. The agreement relates to outstanding issues on Prisoners of War (POW) and Missing in Action (MIA) from the Iran-Iraq war. Schaerer said that in a previous meeting in February the two sides had failed to reach an agreement because the GOI believed Iran still held some Iraqi POWs, which Iran disputed, and because Iran wanted remains of Iranian MIAs returned before it would agree to resolve cases of Iraqi POWs. Schaerer noted that there are only 115-120 Iraqis whose status cannot be clarified (i.e., who could possibly be POWs), and that Iran last provided information on POWs in 2003. Schaerer said that this process had been complicated because some people did not want to share information about their family members and others did not want to be notified.

¶10. (C) The two sides have agreed to create two subcommittees to deal with these issues. One will work to resolve all remaining questions regarding the POW cases. The other will work to resume exhumation and repatriation of remains of MIAs. ICRC will assist both countries in this process. Schaerer also noted that the GOI will meet with the Kuwaitis in November to discuss similar issues, and the ICRC may exhume some Kuwaiti MIA in Ramadi for return to Kuwait.

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Future of IRCS  
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¶11. (C) Schaerer said that since the former leaders of the Iraq Red Crescent Society (IRCS) have either fled or been arrested for corruption and other crimes, there has been confusion over control of the IRCS. On July 31, the Prime Minister appointed a transitional President and board to oversee the organization until it can convene a national assembly to elect a new board. The Prime Minister's office has officially notified ICRC of these appointments and ICRC is advising the interim committee on restoring order to IRCS. Schaerer noted the interim leaders now have control over IRCS financial accounts.

¶12. (C) In late September, a number of IRCS provincial branch presidents and other members, along with ousted former IRCS President Sa'ed Hakki, met in Sulaymaniyah and elected former Communications Minister Jowan Masum as interim head of the organization. Schaerer worried that the election of Masum (whose father heads a Kurdish faction in the Council of Representatives), which was backed by some Talabani advisors,

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could lead to a schism in the organization and possibly prompt the secession of the KRG branches from the IRCS. Schaerer said that ICRC would consult with the influential Erbil branch president, who had not participated in the election of Masum, in an effort to head off separation from the national group.

¶13. (C) Schaerer said that ICRC would meet with the International Federation of the Red Cross in Amman on October 12 to agree on a position regarding IRCS leadership. While ICRC does not normally favor government involvement in determining the leadership of national societies, it had earlier this year advised the GOI to put an end to the corruption and chaos of the IRCS. Schaerer said the ICRC would likely issue a statement of support at the end of October for the Prime Minister's appointees. Schaerer said he would inform the Embassy prior to any statement. Up to now, the ICRC had been careful to avoid taking an official position that might anger branch leaders who supported Masum and potentially impact the security environment in which ICRC operates. The Ambassador advised ICRC to build consensus for its approach by reaching out to the Kurdish leadership. Schaerer said he would do so.  
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